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Op-Ed -- Pelikan's Antidisambiguation: The Kindle is the 8-track Tape Player of the eBook Age

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Op Ed — Pelikan's Antidisambiguation

The Kindle is the 8-track Tape Player of the eBook Age

by **Michael P. Pelikan** (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>

The announcement of the **Google Class Action Settlement** was the rim shot, the nightclub punchline, to all the preceding public pronouncements regarding the **Google Book Library Project**.

It's beyond credibility to suggest that **Google** hadn't long anticipated this class action suit, even counted on it. The settlement gives **Google** its meal ticket to cost recovery for digitizing all those darned books. More surprising would be to learn that each library administrator who decided to climb aboard the **Google** train anticipated this outcome.

Let's remember early efforts to convert books into accessible digital content. Those academic libraries that truly broke the first new ground learned that digitization was bloody complicated, and bloody expensive, too.

But the real dismay arrived as the second and third-wave institutions decided to try their hand at it (as try they must, for nobody wanted to slide from second and third-wave to fourth or fifth...). Despite the multitude of papers published on the subject, the many presentations at **ALA** and the **Digital Library Federation**, the many examples painstakingly built at their peer (or perceived-peer) institutions, libraries in the second and third wave were appalled to discover that digitization was *still* bloody complicated and *still* bloody expensive, too.

So **Google's** proposition looked pretty good. **Google** apparently had the deep pockets, the deep staff, and the deep understanding to tackle this. Honestly: everyone in their right mind must have understood that a mechanism for cost recovery would eventually be part of the bargain; that the libraries' involvement would not simply end at the loading dock; that at some point the acquisitions and licensing folks would become involved and money would change hands. Truth be told, it's still a pretty good deal.

More importantly, the settlement provides everybody with a fig leaf: "This outcome was forced upon us by the settlement". Fig leafs never go out of style.

In the previous episode of this column we were discussing the **Kindle** and the **Sony Reader**. Events have progressed apace in the ensuing weeks! **Amazon** has sent a **DMCA** takedown notice to the **MobileRead** Web forum for posting a link to a site offering a perl script permitting you to retrieve the unique identifier from your **Kindle**, **Amazon's** been sued for patent infringement by **Discovery**, a group of publishers have entered into a book sharing agreement with **Scribd**, and, as this column went to bed, **Sony** and **Google** announced that **Google Book Library Project** content would be made available through **Sony's** eBook store. So let's resume, as promised.

What continues to elude us is the fact that since at least the mid-90's, *all our stuff has been born digital!* These are already eBooks, folks! The content our libraries collect doesn't get analogized (that's the counterpart to digitized) until the very last moment, when the ink is pressed into the mashed-up tree pulp (or if you're classy, the acid-free cotton fiber). *Then y*ou've got an analog object — and it truly is an analog, in the old-word sense, to the original, born-digital object. It can be bought, shipped, received, labeled, shelved, lent, carried off for a couple of weeks, read on the beach, wept over, recalled, returned, and lent again — just like the real physical object that it is.

We built our libraries around these objects, long before they became born-digital — and not just our physical plants. Our integrated library systems were built, from the ground up, to manage a physical collection — a collection of tangible objects of knowable and determined location. That's really a fundamental premise, isn't it? A book can't be in more than one place at a time, can it? If it is, you need to have separate items — hence bibliographic records vs. item records.

But an eBook seems ephemeral. How can we lend an eBook? What would that mean?

A few years ago, I thought about how it might work. I was still at the stage where I didn't think it was really an eBook if you didn't have, in-hand, the eBook file itself: the file, or object, *something* to have and to hold. It seemed to me that a kind of physical lending library-centric **DRM** (**Digital Rights Management**) could be devised, permitting an eBook to be accounted for and lent by our existing circulation systems.

The patron could locate the book in the catalog in the traditional way, but instead of marching to the stacks, finding the copy, and taking it to the Circ Desk, she might simply download it. The Circ system would make a note that this copy of the eBook was charged out. The downloaded file would contain, along with the desired material, a kind of digital hourglass. At the end of the lending period, the book would expire in place, make itself unable to be opened, or simply delete itself. This might require a tiny client running as a process on the borrower's machine, a little digital guy in a black hood with a tiny scythe, waiting to administer the coup de grace at the appointed time. The library could even recall the book with its exiting systems: just send a message to the little digital grim reaper on the patron's machine that time's up, and swish! No more charged-out copy! The item would be back "in-hand", ready to be lent again.

Would a patron willingly allow that little digital grim reaper on his or her machine? Sure, if that's what it took to borrow an eBook!

Now, all of these gothic notions were on my mind several years ago, when I still thought that it wasn't really an eBook if you didn't have your hands on the file, the download, the object itself. Today I'm much less certain that these are required attributes of an eBook.

It seems to me that draconian **DRM**, little digital grim reapers, etc..., are only required if whole files, entire objects, are changing hands. It's really all about cost recovery, isn't it? Nobody thinks that **CNN** is going to put **DRM** on their news Website. Why? Because they've worked out a way (after some tough fits and starts) to achieve cost recovery *and* provide access, without caring who or where you are, what Internet service provider you're using, or who you bought your computer from. (Well, for one thing, they know that letting you see their Website makes it more likely that you'll watch their cable channel. Publishers: *please* make a note of this).

It seems to me that the **EVDO** cellular connectivity the **Kindle** relies upon is kind of the dial-up modem of the coming wireless-everywhere age. Why does **Amazon** have us download the whole book? From our perspective, it's so that we can read it on the airliner or the beach where there's no wireless (yet); so we can feel we've gotten "something" for our ten bucks; so we can be comforted by the verisimilitude the **Kindle** achieves. Right?

Well yes, but really, from **Amazon's** perspective, it's about cost recovery for developing the device and paying for

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Endnotes for **A Prototype Platform ...** *from page 47*

1. Corresponding author, <Micah_Altman@harvard.edu>. This project was supported by an award (PA#NDP03-1) from the **Library of Congress** through its *National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP)*.

2. See **David S. Rosenthal**, **Thomas Robertson**, **Tom Lipkis**, **Vicky Reich**, **Seth Morabito**. "Requirements for Digital Preservation: A Bottom-Up Approach," *D-Lib Magazine* 11 no. 11 (2005).

3. See **Victoria Reich**, and **David S. Rosenthal**, "LOCKSS (Lots Of Copies Keep Stuff Safe)," Preservation 2000, *The New Review of Academic Librarianship* 6: 155- 161 (2000).

4. See **Carl Lagoze**, **Herbert Van de Sompel**, **M. Nelson**, **M., & S. Warner**, "The Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting - Version 2.0," (2002). (Accessed March 24, 2009) *http://www.openarchives.org/OAI/openarchivesprotocol.html*.

5. See **Gary King** "An Introduction to the Dataverse Network as an Infrastructure for Data Sharing," *Sociological Methods and Research* 32 no 2 (2007): 173-199.

6. See **Blank**, **Grant** and **Karsten Boye Rasmussen**. The Data Documentation Initiative. The Value and Significance of a Worldwide Standard. In: *Social Science Computer Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 307-318 (2004).

7. For a description of **Data-PASS** collection development and its challenges, see **Myron Gutmann**, et. al, 2009, "From Preserving the Past to Preserving the Future: The **Data-PASS** Project and the challenges of preserving digital social science data." *Library Trend*s (in press).

The **Data-PASS** project Website is: *http://www.icpsr.org/DATAPASS/*.

8. Both the **Harvard-MIT Data Center** and the **Henry A. Murray Research Archive** are now part of the Institute for Quantitative Social Science, in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences at **Harvard University**.

9. **Data-PASS** has been, in part, funded by an award from *National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program* (NDIIPP).

10. **Data-PASS** is striving toward becoming a virtual organization conforming with preservation standards and practices, and in particular the TRAC (Trusted Repositories Audit & Certification) checklist. As such, it is a long-term goal that the virtual organization as a whole be able to demonstrate conformance with these standards, but not essential that every participating host of the SSP platform be conformant. Demonstrating conformance with these examples of digital preservation community standards and practice entails explicitly documenting the approach of a repository is addressing the requirements (mapping actions and developments to the requirements) and being able to provide evidence that the requirements are being addressed. The TRAC requirements incorporate the essential requirements of both the Trusted Digital Repositories and the OAIS documents.

11. Our model of changing network state is based on simple primitives. The tool uses the difference report to generate a set of requests of the form: *HOST_ID* [start|stop] *COLLECTION_ID* (with plugin parameters XYZ).

The early stages of this effort consist of sending the requests as email messages to the administrators of the hosts requiring changes, and providing them with a tool to update their LOCKSS configuration based on the requests. We are investigating more automated approaches, however the **LOCKSS PLN** architecture does not currently offer hooks for automated remote management with restricted privileges, and allowing full access to automated clients is unacceptable from a security standpoint.

12. For a description of the common catalog and cataloging standards, see: **Altman**, et. al., 2009, "Digital Preservation Through Archival Collaboration," *The American Archivist,* (Forthcoming.)

13. With regard to the software used in our system, much of it is based on standard **LOCKSS**, or uses extensions to it, created in response to the requests from our projects and other users of PLN's. Much of the software we developed for our prototype system, such as the extensions to the harvesting plugins we describe above, has also now been contributed back to the **LOCKSS** project.

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the deal with **Sprint**. That book was delivered by **Amazon's** service, to **Amazon's** device, generating **Amazon's** associative metadata, richly profiling the demographics of their audience: this detailed demographic data is likely a near-irresistible value-add to offer to the publishers in exchange for signing on to the **Kindle** distribution service.

Synchronize your page location between your **Kindle** and your **iPhone**? It's neat, I guess. Well actually, it's not really such a big deal to accomplish, but it does enrich **Amazon's** understanding of how the material they sell is consumed, when, over how long a period, even where, given the rudimentary GPS capabilities of the devices involved.

But this way of moving e-content around is transitional, folks. The **Kindle** is the 8-track tape player of the eBook age. I'm not saying that's bad — I'm just saying it's so.

Always remember: We like to think we're living in the Modern Age, but really we're living in the Old Days!

We're living back in the time when you had to download a book to read it — and not just that, but download it to a specific, licensed device, in a specified format, from a specific service, over a specific connection, provided by a specific vendor! (This attempt at lock-in kind of sounds like **iTunes** or the **iPhone app store**, doesn't it)?

Am I suggesting, throughout this column, that **Amazon** or **Sony** or **Google** don't deserve a mechanism for cost recovery? Certainly not! Thank goodness someone has finally achieved some traction in these arenas!

But imagine if **CNN** only let you see their Website if you used a computer you'd bought from **CNN**, using only the browser they sold you, and only over the Internet service they specified — and then made you pay by the item as well.

We're not done figuring all of this out yet, but at least we know who's paying for the R&D.

Rumors
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from **Houben–Weyl**, **Science of Synthesis**, **SYNLETT** and **SYNTHESIS** covering a variety of themes have been collocated and can be downloaded for free during the course of this year on the **Thieme Chemistry Website**.
www.thieme-chemistry.com
www.science-of-synthesis.com

We have a fascinating interview in this issue with **Kent D. Lee** of **East View Information Services**. **East View** began in 1989 sourcing print content from the former Soviet Union and now the general thrust of **East View** is to bring primary source information – print or digital – to Western markets from countries of the East – Russia, Eastern Europe, the Far East, and now the Middle East. See this issue, p.50.

Some of us may remember **Georges deLorme** and **Les Livres Etrangers** which was a thriving business before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. I understand from **Kent's** interview that **Mr. deLorme** has a restaurant in Paris these days. My husband **Bruce** and I had the good fortune to meet the charming **Mr. deLorme** and we remember sitting in a Paris café on the left bank. I'll bet that he has a great restaurant!

Speaking of Georges – The hard-working **George Machovec** tells me that library users in Colorado now have access to tens of thousands of additional **open-access digitized books and serials** through the **Prospector Library Catalog**. The digitized items originate from the **University of Michigan**, a partner in the **Google Books** digitization project and a member of a consortium of libraries called **Hathi Trust**. Last year the **University of Michigan** made available bibliographic records for many of the out-of-copyright titles that **Google** digitized from its collections.

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